



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 110
Lewistown, Montana 59457



Representative Kendall Van Dyk
Chairman
Montana House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

March 3, 2009

EXHIBIT 2
DATE 3/18/09
SB 5519

Dear Chairman Van Dyk,

I wanted to take this opportunity to provide some clarification from the perspective of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) regarding Senate Joint Resolution 19. The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR) was established by Executive Order (EO) 7509 in 1936. The established purpose, as defined in EO 7509, for the CMR is the "...natural forage resources therein shall **first** be utilized for the purpose of sustaining four hundred thousand (400,000) sharptail (sic) grouse, and one thousand five hundred (1,500) antelope, the primary species, and such nonpredatory secondary species in such numbers that may be necessary to maintain a balanced wildlife population..." The executive order when on the state "provided further that all the forage resources within this range or preserve shall be available, except herein provided with respect to wildlife, for domestic livestock." The Service has been challenged in court three times regarding the interpretation of the EO. The courts have ruled in favor the Service in all cases and have stated that the EO is clear that wildlife has priority for the forage resources of the refuge. Through numerous wildlife and habitat monitoring programs, the Service has determined that the habitat needs of the primary species and many secondary species as defined by EO 7509 are not being achieved.

Secondly, the Service has met numerous times with various members of the local communities surrounding the CMR, various special interest groups and government agencies concerning the current management and the planned management of CMR through the development of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). We have held fourteen public scoping meetings in Lewistown, Jordan, Glasgow/Ft Peck, Malta, Bozeman, Billings and Great Falls as part of the CCP process. We extended cooperating agency status to the Conservation Districts with one representative to convey information and solicit input/comments from the six county conservation districts around the refuge. I have extended an invitation to meet with any group interested in discussing the current management or the CCP process. Several groups have taken advantage of this offer in the past two years. We have posted information concerning the CCP on our website and we have received over 24,000 comments to date.

I hope you will consider this information when debating this resolution and I encourage you and any other members of the committee to contact me at 406-538-8706 if you there any questions.

Sincerely,

Barron Crawford
Project Leader
Charles M. Russell NWR Complex